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SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY: SRI LANKAN COLUMNIST SAYS U.S., "BOGGED DOWN IN IRAQ, CRAWLS BACK TO UN"

In a 9/7 iteration of his weekly piece, "Inside the glass house" Sri Lankan columnist Thalif Deen virulently attacked U.S. policy in Iraq. The column, subtitled "Bogged down in Iraq, US crawls back to UN," says that the U.S., which "did not need the blessings of the United Nations to go into Iraq," is now "facing the hard reality that it needs the United Nations -- just to get out of Iraq." But, Deen argues, "there will be hard political bargaining behind closed doors before any resolution sees the light of day," with the French and the Germans, plus, possibly, the Arab League and the NAM, leading the opposition. The column closes: "Amidst all this hoopla, nobody has bothered to ask whether the Iraqis would really welcome a multinational peacekeeping force. Or will this force also go the way of the US-British coalition?"

12. "Bogged down in Iraq, US crawls back to UN" follows verbatim:

Quote.

NEW YORK-- As the world's only superpower, the US did not need the blessings of the United Nations to go into Iraq. But six bloodied months later, it is facing the hard reality that it needs the United Nations-- just to get out of Iraq.

The US is looking for an escape route out of a growing military quagmire in Iraq where 140,000 American troops are now bogged down in a war of attrition. Madeleine Albright, a former US Secretary of State and an ex-US ambassador to the United Nations, says that the Bush administration once dismissed the world body as "bureaucratic, ineffective, undemocratic, anti-US and irrelevant".

So why is the US crawling back to the United Nations seeking assistance from an Organisation it despised? To gradually get its soldiers out of an increasingly deadly country where Americans are dying at an average of about one per day? To get international economic assistance for the reconstruction of Iraq?

All of this -- and more. The war on Iraq -- and particularly its disastrous aftermath -- has turned out to be one of the Bush administration's biggest foreign policy debacles.

One newspaper called the new US appeal to the UN a "humiliating" experience for the White House.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his neo-conservative hardliners in the Bush administration were the primary architects behind the war. They were right in describing the war as a "cake walk" -- lining up some of the world's most sophisticated weapons against a militarily weak, sanctions-hit country.

But they were dead wrong in assuming that in post-war Iraq American troops will be welcomed with "rose petals" in the streets of Baghdad. The "rose petals" have turned out to be car bombs, landmines and explosive incendiary devices.

While the US is still scrambling to put together an international peace keeping force -- described as "a coalition of the willing" -- the speculation is that there is already "a coalition of the willing" of all the world's terrorist groups who have assembled in Iraq to turn the country into a shooting gallery.

President Bush's decision to return to the UN is also a defeat for Rumsfeld and a morale booster for Secretary of State Colin Powell. Dangling carrots before the Security Council, the US last week tried to win support for a new UN resolution for a multi-national peacekeeping force in Iraq by pledging a time-table for elections and the restoration of sovereignty to the Iraqi people currently under American military occupation.

After speaking to key members of the Security Council -- including France, Russia and Germany -- Powell told reporters that the proposed resolution will not only call for a new multinational force but also provide a specific

time frame for elections in Iraq.

According to the US, the new force will be under a unified US military command, not a UN command. But there will be hard political bargaining behind closed doors before any resolution sees the light of day.

The strongest opposition is expected to come from France whose President, Jacques Chirac, says the resolution does not go far enough. Germany, a close ally of France in the Security Council, is equally hesitant. German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder, who like Chirac opposed the US war on Iraq, is once again backing France against the US.

Both countries want an end to the military occupation, full sovereignty to the Iraqi people and a larger political authority to the UN to rebuild the war-ravaged country. If the US refuses to accede to French demands, the two countries may be heading on a collision course in the Security Council: a replay of an earlier dispute between the two veto wielding members.

The US was forced to go to war with Iraq without UN authorisation because France threatened to exercise its veto. But so far Chirac has not made any threats. The US has already indicated it wants the new resolution adopted before President Bush visits the UN to address the General Assembly sessions on Sep. 23. But that may seem too optimistic and ambitious -- unless Washington caves into French and German demands.

The 119-member Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the largest single Third World political body at the UN, has not taken a stand on the creation of a new multinational force primarily because 22 Arab states who are members of NAM are abiding by a decision taken by the League of Arab States on the aftermath of the war on Iraq.

The League has refused to recognise both the legitimacy of the Iraqi Governing Council -- whose 25 members have been described as US "puppets" -- or the US military occupation of Iraq. Amidst all this hoopla, nobody has bothered to ask whether the Iraqis would really welcome a multinational peacekeeping force. Or will this force also go the way of the US-British coalition?

End quote.

13. Comment. Deen's column, "Inside the glass house," appears weekly in the SUNDAY TIMES (independent English weekender). The TIMES is published by the Wijeya Group, publishers of the DAILY MIRROR (independent English daily), LANKADEEPA (independent Sinhala daily), and SUNDAY LANKADEEPA (independent Sinhala weekender). The Wijeya Groups newspapers are among the most respected in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, Deen's column is resolutely anti-American.

Lunstead